

# BOOK REVIEWS

David Horspool, *Richard III: A Ruler and His Reputation* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2015); pp. ix + 321; ISBN 978-0-271-06650-9.

The discovery of Richard III's body in the car park of Leicester City Council in September 2012 was the culmination of a project called "Looking for Richard: In Search of a King." This project brought together enthusiasts, academics, media, geneticists and the Council itself, with the aim that if Richard III's remains were identified they would be re-interred in Leicester Cathedral. Richard III reigned for just over two years, died in battle at Bosworth Field, and was buried in the Franciscan monastic site of Greyfriars, in Leicester. After the Dissolution of the Monasteries Greyfriars was demolished and Richard's grave was lost. During the Tudor monarchy became a byword for evil, the hunchbacked usurper who had murdered his nephews out of untrammelled ambition. Throughout history he acquired many defenders, and in 1924 a society named for him was formed with the intention of rehabilitating his reputation. Philippa Langley, secretary of the Scottish branch of the Richard III Society, and historian John Ashdown-Hill were awarded MBEs in 2015 for their contribution to the project, which was revealed in the documentary "Richard III: The King in the Car Park" (2013).

This new biography was occasioned by this discovery; it is a cautious study of Richard III, as Horspool is aware of the high emotions that surround his subject. The discovery of the body revealed one important fact; that Richard suffered from severe scoliosis; supporters of the "maligned" king had long contended that the "hunchback" presented in William Shakespeare's famous play was nothing more than Tudor propaganda, but it appears this was not so. Horspool takes a chronological approach to Richard's life, sifting the contemporary evidence for his whereabouts, actions, and involvement in politics. There are themes that resonate for contemporary England, particularly its relationship with Europe. Richard (1452-1485) was born into a war-torn world; the Battle of Castillon, a defeat for England on 17 July 1453, ended the Hundred Years' War, which in fact had been running since 1337, quite a bit longer than a century. The political situation in England was tumultuous; since the rebellion of Jack Cade in 1450 the reign of Henry VI, pious, ineffectual and mentally unstable, was on borrowed time. Cade had identified Richard, duke of York, then living in exile in Ireland, as his rightful lord. On 22 May 1455 the Wars of the Roses, a conflict between the houses of Lancaster and York, and stemming from multiple claimants to the throne tracing their lineages to the

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sons of King Edward III, commenced with the First Battle of St Albans, a defeat for the Yorkists. Richard of York was Protector until 1460 when he and his second son Edmund of Rutland were killed. Edward of March, York's eldest son, won a decisive victory at Towton on 29 March 1461 and became King Edward IV.

Richard was a key part of his brother's administration of the realm until Edward died on 9 April 1483. Horspool clears away much of the romance that Ricardians have wound around Richard of Gloucester: his marriage to Anne Neville is more about property than love (the same motivation that his elder brother George of Clarence exhibited when he married Anne's elder sister Isabel); his oft-touted piety is reduced to the ownership of a number of religious books; his ambition and ruthlessness are allowed to exist in the context of fifteenth century politics. Horspool's verdict on Richard is that he probably did murder his nephews (or arrange for their removal), he accused his dead brother Edward IV of bigamy, branded his own mother Cicely Neville an adulteress, and was responsible for the deaths of others, including William, Lord Hastings. Horspool is sympathetic to the Richard III Society, which he discusses in the final chapter, "My Shadow as I Pass" (a quotation from Shakespeare's play). Here he discusses the twentieth century rehabilitations by academics like Clements Markham, Charles Ross, and Rosemary Horrox, all of whom aimed to "see Richard in comparison to other nobles, and other kings, of his time" (p. 262). Horspool's verdict on Richard III is harsh, yet the unfolding narrative he builds makes it inevitable: "Whether or not Richard was a bad man, he was a bad king. His actions led not only to his own destruction, but that of his dynasty. Can there be a blacker mark against a medieval king's name than that?" (p. 266). This book is to be commended for its sober and unemotional tone, its close attention to the details of available sources, and its accessibility to non-specialist readers. Horspool's study of Richard III wears its learning lightly, is attractive and compelling, and is sensitive to issues like reputation, popularity, defenders and fans. It deserves a wide readership.

Carole M. Cusack  
University of Sydney

Marc Nichanian, G. M. Goshgarian, and Jeff Fort, *Mourning Philology: Art and Religion at the Margins of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014); pp. x + 406; ISBN 978-0-8232-5524-5.

*Toward what veiled goal is the Armenian artist staggering, amid the turbulent scenes that uncertain Destiny has cruelly forged with the sweeping blows of affliction?* This quotation, taken from the opening manifesto of *Mehyan*, aptly sums up the impact of this book, which chronicles a process of artistic expression in service of national reinvention, beset by realised and unrealised trauma. In a translation and synthesis of three poems of the *Meyan* — a short-lived seven-part journal written in Constantinople between January to July of 1914 — Marc Nichanian provides a case for the Armenian nationalist project as reflected in poetry as a site of aesthetic and philosophical rebellion. The power of these poems is intensified by the traumatic backdrop that we are now all too aware of, the catastrophes of 1915 and the purge of the Armenian intelligentsia on the eve of World War 1. Thus, Nichanian's book serves multiple goals: it provides a translation of these important poems, situates these works with the philological paradigms of 'the native' and 'paganesque mythology' of the late eighteenth century, and finally, comments of the national and political reality of art as it is conceptualised, manufactured, and reimagined.

Nichanian stresses at the outset that the 'aesthetic principal', that "art is at the origins of religion" is bound to a cyclical relationship between the creation of art and the role of mythological religion in society. Neo-paganism appealed to the *Meyan* poets, who were seeking to express, through the mourning of the pagan gods, a reinvigorated Armenian nationalist experience. In an imposing translation from the original French title *Le Deuil de la Philologie*, the second volume of Nichanian's *Entre l'art et le témoignage*, this book emphasises the connection between nationalism, religion, art and mourning in the late Ottoman period. In expressing this neo-pagan poetic style, these Armenian poets sought traumatic expression on the eve of an unforeseen tragedy that would encompass and engross the national consciousness. Each chapter of *Mourning Philology* can be read in isolation and each contains sufficient density of analysis to synthesise the poem being considered with the context that it was written. The addition of having each of the translated

texts as appendices allows the reader to go back and forth, ponder the context and insert parts of their own interpretive process to Nichanian's analysis. Read together, the texts and commentaries form a well-thought-out argument for the evolution of Armenian nationalism and its relationship to both the poetic works and the setting of Constantinople between 1908 and 1915, the calm before the storm.

The first chapter sets the scene, providing the conceptual and contextual foundations for what will be considered. Commencing with the life and works of F. W. J. von Schelling, Nichanian delineates a path of definitions and paradigms that date back to Schelling's last lecture as the chair of Philosophy at the University of Jena in 1800. Here it was that Schelling highlighted the position that art and the aesthetic method are interlocked in a power relationship, that the 'aesthetic principal' lies at the foundation of philosophical conceptions of social reality. The second and third sections focus on the creation of *Meyan* and its authors Daniel Varuzhan, Constant Zarian, and Hagop Oshagan. The translation of *Meyha* as "pagan temple" lies at the heart of this treatment. From 1908 to 1915, the "aesthetic principal" empowered artists and intellectuals of Constantinople to engage in the meaning and power of art in the fermentation of the national spirit. Nichanian engages with this opposition of contemporary understandings of nationalism to assert that "nationalism is aestheticisation". In essence, this book is a disentanglement of this phrase, something that Nichanian himself admits he only understood after decades of contemplation.

In the second part, *The End of Religion*, Nichanian deconstructs the concepts of the native and of the native's inherent tragedy in nationalist discourse. In essence, to be native is to be removed from the system of mourning whilst at the same time being witness (or even evidence) of disaster and tragedy. This concept is explored in the correspondence and poetry of Varuzhan between 1908 and 1909, in the months before and after the Young Turk Party overthrowing of the Ottoman Sultan. To the Ottoman minority communities, this period was to be that of progress, peace, and stability, particularly as the Young Turk Party was supported by many minority political groups including Armenians. However even in this political context, Varuzhan through his pagan poetry issued dire warning of national complacency. Here the philologist and ethnologist are positioned as the network connecting the 'native' to their ancestral heritage, a network that does not share their national aesthetics. Varuzhan in using poetic

paganism was urging his Armenian compatriots to create a bridge to the past as something essential to the nationalist project, one that was expressed in terms of those gods already mourned and out of reach from the philologists. Only with the vernacular of the already mourned ancient gods could a language and aesthetic of the nation be created.

For this group of early twentieth century poets, the aesthetic was connected to the ancient Armenian pantheon that Christianity had disposed of over 1500 years earlier. In this last section, *The Mourning of Religion*, Nicheanian provides a contextual background to the gods of pre-Christian Armenian polytheism as reflected in Varuzhan's poetry. As with the concept of the native and its inherent connection to ethnic destruction, so was religion tied to the death of pagan identities. The only vehicle to memorialise and communicate this now forgotten site of mourning was through Art. In this case, in the form of poetry, invokes the pagan pre-Christian gods to revitalise the national narrative, to allow a space for national mourning that has not yet occurred.

*Mourning Philology* is a dense read with a particularly meandering expression derived from its original, no doubt poetic French text. In this regard, the translation could have done better to make the text more palatable to an Anglophone audience. Appropriate to a wide range of studies in religion and philology specialists, this book is significantly interesting to those in the areas of: aesthetics of nationalism; late-Ottoman aesthetics, and Armenian literature. To be read in more than one sitting, and perhaps revisiting sections more than once, this book asserts the role that literary and aesthetic foundation has to the construction of national identity. One inextricably tied to mourning and religious myth. Far away from political and economic rational, Nicheanian concludes that these early attempts to reconfigure national discourse via aesthetic paganism accompanied the traumatic narrative of genocide that befell the Armenians, Assyrians, and Pontic Greeks, during World War I. Nicheanian re-asserts that the philological paganism expressed in the act of mourning is neo-Nietzschean; the loss of religion for the sake of mythology and art are essential to the emergence of the nation.

Daniel J. Tower  
University of Sydney